



SAFETY ALERT 06-01

Seventeenth Coast Guard District
United States Coast Guard
Box 25517
Juneau, Alaska 99802

GROUNDING LEADING TO EVACUATION OF PASSENGERS AND CREW **CHAIK BAY, ALASKA**

Background: The Seventeenth Coast Guard District Small Passenger Vessel Safety Alert program provides timely safety-related information of “Lessons Learned” from marine casualties. The program is part of an ongoing effort to apply Prevention Through People (PTP) principles to improve maritime safety in Alaska’s waters.

Incident: An 81-ft uninspected passenger vessel carrying seven passengers and four crew struck a submerged object on low tide while transiting the restricted waters at the head of Chaik Bay. The vessel was holed, took on water and sustained extensive damage to the shaft and rudder. In an effort to prevent further sinking, the master intentionally grounded the vessel on shore. The operator issued a “MayDay” call to the Coast Guard on VHF-FM Channel 16 with the vessel’s position and nature of distress. A Coast Guard cutter in the area responded and all passengers were evacuated to the cutter. A Coast Guard helicopter was also dispatched to the scene with dewatering pumps. Temporary repairs were made by a commercial salvor and the vessel was refloated at the next high tide. Even though the vessel suffered significant hull damage, there were no injuries or pollution.

Lessons Learned: While the cause of the casualty is under investigation, there are several important points that are relevant to this incident.

1. Vessel operators must ensure that they have onboard the most current paper charts for the waters transited. Due to the limitations of present large scale charts for some areas in Alaska, operators should consider developing “customized charts” that better depict hazards.
2. Crew training in emergency situations is critical in minimizing the consequences of marine accidents and conducting safe evacuations. Conducting drills at the dock and while underway prepare crewmembers for emergency situations and increase survival chances.
3. Alaskan waters pose unique navigational challenges and hazards. Operators should ensure they have an in depth familiarity with the route and waters transited and heed warnings listed in the US Coast Pilot publication and charts. Operators should consider pre-season voyages to familiarize crews about waterways and to minimize the risk of accidents.
4. Vessels should have an emergency communications capability. This was critical in directing appropriate Coast Guard rescue assets to the scene.
5. Crews working on commercial vessels in excess of 100 gross tons are required to have Merchant Mariners documents.
6. The potential for loss of life is significant when operating in Alaskan waters. The Coast Guard’s 5-Star program addresses the need to increase the level of safety equipment (beyond the minimum required by regulation) for uninspected passenger vessels. Additional lifesaving equipment will significantly improve survival chances. For more information, contact the local Coast Guard Marine Safety Office or the website at www.uscg.mil/d17/m/6pac.